

ENTERTAINMENT

Children's curiosity uncaged during zoo program at library



Thomas Metthe/Reporter-News Michaela Bietz holds her daughter, Adelyn, 3, as she touches Annie the alligator, held by Joy Harsh, education curator for the Abilene Zoo, during a presentation Tuesday afternoon at the South Branch of the Abilene Public Library.

By Scott Kirk, Special to the Reporter-News

Yesterday 7:53 p.m.

There was a bit of disagreement among the Nichols siblings — Deagan, 7, Bryson, 6, and 4-year-old Brylee — over which of the animals brought to the South Branch of the Abilene Public Library on Tuesday afternoon was the coolest.

The trio, who attend St. John's Episcopal School, were among more than 100 children in attendance for an exhibition by Joy Harsh, education curator at the Abilene Zoo, who brought several zoo residents to the program at the library.

Deagan and Brylee thought Annie the alligator was hands down the best. Bryson opted for Tiberius, a blue-tongued skink. Murray, a pancake tortoise, was down the list, and one could assume that the two unnamed cockroaches Harsh brought merited no consideration.

The zoo program is one of the more popular programs each summer at the library, said Alyssa Crow, children's librarian at the South Branch of the Abilene Public Library.

"We're always happy when Joy comes," Crow said.

Harsh said she chose the animals to correspond with the library's dinosaur theme for its summer reading clubs for children and teens. She said the species displayed Tuesday were nearly as old as the dinosaurs and had changed very little.

Her educational talk elicited several questions both academic ("How big will Annie get?") and less scholarly ("Could you let Annie loose on the floor?").

The answers were 12 to 16 feet and no.

Deagan said she liked the way Annie's tail moved and that she was surprised to learn that alligators could live 80 years. Her brother said the best thing about Tiberius was his blue tongue.

Harsh also will present a program July 19 at the downtown library, but said she hasn't decided which animals she will bring. She said she sometimes makes that decision at the last minute.

"I'll have an idea, but I'll wait to see who's having a good day," Harsh said.

Annie is among the animals who can be more temperamental, although it's probably difficult to tell whether a tortoise or a cockroach is having a bad day.

This was one of Annie's good days, Harsh said, and the alligator lay still in Harsh's arms while dozens of kids came by to stroke her back.

Harsh said that if Annie was feeling rambunctious, there would be a lot of squirming and swinging of her tail.

"She's smacked me in the back a few times," she said.

Harsh said she wasn't surprised that Annie appeared to be the popular choice among the children. She said that seeing an animal with which people are familiar but don't often get to see up close is something many enjoy.

Harsh said one of the goals of the program is to educate children not to be afraid of animals.

"You have a healthy respect for them, but you're not so afraid of them that you make them extinct," she said.

Find this article at:

<http://www.reporternews.com/entertainment/childrens-curiosity-uncaged-during-zoo-program-at-library-36e8c113-5423-7013-e053-0100007f4b84-385631881.html>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.